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Florida High School Athletic Assn. and Transfer Rule - NFL Malaise

Richard C. Crepeau
University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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The Florida High School Activities Association and its board of principals made headlines this past week with one of those decisions that make absolutely no sense to anyone. At Lake Brantley High School the football coach made a decision to add a player to his squad, who although he had attended Lake Brantley High, did not live in the district. He was attending Lake Brantley in order to take advantage of the Emotionally Handicapped Resource program which was not available at the school in his district. This student was on the football team, not because he was a great runner or great passer, but because the coach decided that this young man's presence on the team, would help the young man with his emotional problems. He has not played a single down, of a single game.

But the Florida High School Activities Association has rules which govern such things as a student from one district attending a school in another district and competing in athletics. These rules are designed for a very good purpose; to keep star athletes from moving from school to school and to keep coaches from recruiting star players, a practice that has been quite common over the years.

So the rules are needed and should be enforced with a vengeance whenever they are broken. But rules and laws are made for specific purposes, and should be used only for those purposes. The difference between the letter and the spirit of the law is generally clear, and should be acknowledged when it is clear. Civil societies live by the spirit, bureaucracies by the letter of the law, the domain of the small-minded.

In the Lake Brantley case clearly the spirit of the law has not been violated. But the letter of the law was violated. All the t's were not crossed, and all the i's were not dotted. And so in October Ron Davis, the Commissioner of the Florida High School Athletic Association ruled that there had been an improper transfer, the paper work was not in order, and therefore the young man who was practicing with Lake Brantley was ineligible. This meant that Lake Brantley, which is in the middle of an excellent football season, would have to forfeit two games. This would effectively knock them out of any chance for the state playoffs and state championship, to say nothing of what it would do the student at the center of the controversy.

The authorities at Lake Brantley, stunned by the stupidity of the decision, appealed to the board of principals. This past week the board upheld the actions of the Commissioner, thus demonstrating what any good high school teacher could have told you. High school principals are not among the most intellectually gifted of people, nor are they generally in the possession of a surplus of common sense. But they are good bureaucrats.

It is my understanding that the NCAA has been watching these developments with great interest and perhaps even envy. Mr. Davis and the principals involved are now high on the list for employment with the NCAA rules enforcement division.

Just what is going on here. I must say that I have no inside information, but I am willing to bet that at some time in the past the football coach or principal at Lake Brantley High has either angered someone in the Florida High School Athletic Association, or has been suspected by that body of playing fast and loose with the rules. In either case the current technical violation has allowed the FHSAA to come down hard and get their revenge on whomever at Lake Brantley they have been waiting to get. Don't you just love the way sports builds character?

Meanwhile the National Football League has just gone past the halfway mark in the 1991 season. There are surprises aplenty. Miami has been extremely unimpressive and the defending Super Bowl champion New York-New Jersey Giants are sleepwalking. Last Monday night they suffered a humiliating loss to the Philadelphia M*A*S*H unit, led by Jim MacMahon who had all of the mobility of Ed McMahon.

On the up side the Washington Redskins and the New Orleans Saints have been quite impressive. In the American Conference the Buffalo Bills have shown occasional flashes of the brilliant play which marked their 1990 season.

But there is a sense of malaise in the NFL. The games have taken on a quality of dullness and sameness, and even John Madden doesn't seem capable of breaking the boredom. Perhaps the players have noted that the Super Bowl is in Minneapolis in late January, when temperatures often do not reach above zero, and therefore would rather be at home on Super Sunday.

The one NFL constant has been the performance of the Tampa Bay Bucs. They remain uniformly pathetic. They can change coaches, change quarterbacks, make trades, get top draft choices, and

nothing happens. They simply remain pathetic. Problems began for the Bucs in 1983 when they failed to resign Doug Williams as quarterback and let him go off to something called the Oklahoma Outlaws. Since then nothing has gone right for the Bucs.

Maybe what we are looking at here is the NFL version of the "Curse of the Bambino." Could it be that like the Red Sox since Babe Ruth, the Bucs post-Doug Williams will never win a championship? Could it be that the Tampa Bay Bucs are doomed by the "Curse of Doug Williams?"

It was reported this week that the Bucs are the third lowest paid team in the National Football League. They certainly have done everything necessary to earn such a distinction.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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